



ADVANCING HUMANITARIAN DISARMAMENT: STRATEGIES FOR CAMPAIGNING IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Three decades after the emergence of humanitarian disarmament, civilians and the law designed to protect them are facing grave new threats. Shifting geopolitics, an increased number of armed conflicts, and growing disregard for international law have created a difficult environment for promoting and strengthening this approach to governing weapons. Proponents of humanitarian disarmament have nonetheless stood firm, and this guide aims to bolster their efforts.

Humanitarian disarmament seeks to reduce arms-inflicted human suffering and environmental harm through the establishment and implementation of norms. It is distinguished by its people-centered purpose, collaborative and inclusive process, and preventive and remedial provisions. The movement has produced treaties banning antipersonnel landmines, cluster munitions, and nuclear weapons and regulating the arms trade, and a political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.¹ Work continues on implementation, compliance monitoring, and the development of law on other issues, especially autonomous weapons systems.

To respond to contemporary challenges, campaigners should turn to four fundamental principles of humanitarian disarmament.² They should: preserve its humanitarian focus, which can transcend national differences; follow a cooperative approach, which has made past achievements possible; and remain committed to international law as a tool for influencing states parties and other actors. Campaigners should also remember that humanitarian disarmament's ability to adapt has been essential to its success and endurance. It has covered new topics, taken new forms, and used new tactics over the years.



The Broken Chair outside the United Nations (UN) in Geneva, Switzerland, symbolizes a mine victim who has lost a leg. Installed in 1997 to encourage states to join the Mine Ban Treaty, the sculpture has become an emblem for the entire humanitarian disarmament movement. Credit: diegograndi – stock.adobe.com.

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To produce this guide, researchers from the International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC) at Harvard Law School interviewed fourteen campaigners, most of whom work on multiple humanitarian disarmament issues. The interviewees, based Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and North America, represent three global campaigns, six national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and one think tank.

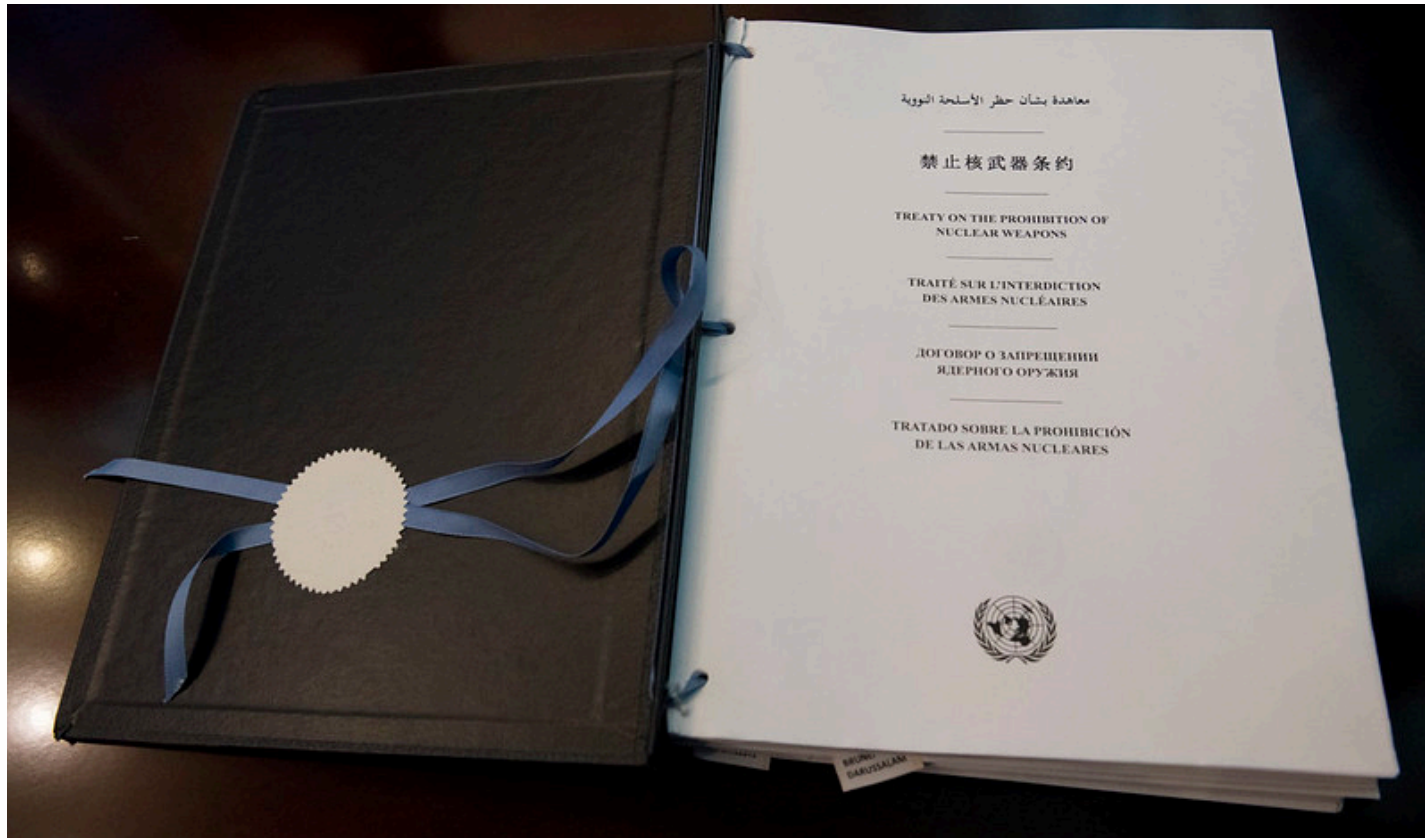
The guide examines current challenges to humanitarian disarmament and why campaigners believe it is important to stay strong and intensify their efforts. It then presents strategies regarding messaging, partnerships, and targets, tactics, and tools. These strategies can help campaigners adapt humanitarian disarmament while preserving its fundamental principles.

It is a moral obligation and so very important that the people who are caught up in the worst of situations know that ... someone is out there trying to stop whatever is happening.... This is the very least that we owe to [them].

**Hine-Wai Loose,
Control Arms**

We need to keep humanitarian disarmament going. We don't have the luxury to lose it.

**Ayman Sorour,
PROTECTION**



The official copy of the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons serves as a reminder of humanitarian disarmament's ongoing influence and ability to adapt to different challenges over time. Credit: ICAN | Darren Ornitz Photography, 2018.

CHALLENGES

Recent years have seen an increase in armed conflict around the world; the 2025 Global Peace Index reported that the number of state-based conflicts was higher in 2023 than any time since World War II.³ In Gaza, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Sudan, Ukraine, and elsewhere, the widespread use of indiscriminate weapons and methods of war along with the arms trade have caused unacceptable harm to civilians. International law has simultaneously been under attack, due to rejection, violation, or inconsistent application of long accepted instruments. National security-centered arguments have been used as justification for tolerating erosion of humanitarian disarmament's norms. Reduced resources and more limited access have made advocacy more difficult.

These humanitarian, legal, political, and practical challenges have struck at the heart of humanitarian disarmament. They have presented threats to both its humanitarian objectives and the legal norms it uses to achieve that goal. If not addressed, these challenges will continue to threaten the rules-based order and endanger civilians in the process.



Antipersonnel mines and cluster munitions have been widely used in recent conflicts, including in Ukraine, leaving explosive ordnance that causes thousands of civilian casualties annually. Credit: neznamov1984.

Humanitarian Challenges

People start to feel that they can use indiscriminate and inhumane weapons with impunity without caring what the impact is. It's a big challenge to the existing international order.

Paul Hannon, Mines Action Canada

Use of Proscribed Weapons

The past several years have seen widespread use of antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions, weapons banned by humanitarian treaties for their indiscriminate nature. Cluster munitions have a wide area effect and cannot distinguish between soldiers and civilians at the time of attack. Both types of weapons endanger civilians long after a conflict: landmines because they are victim activated, cluster munitions because they leave behind unexploded submunitions that are often set off by children, farmers, or returning refugees.

Bombing and Shelling of Cities and Towns

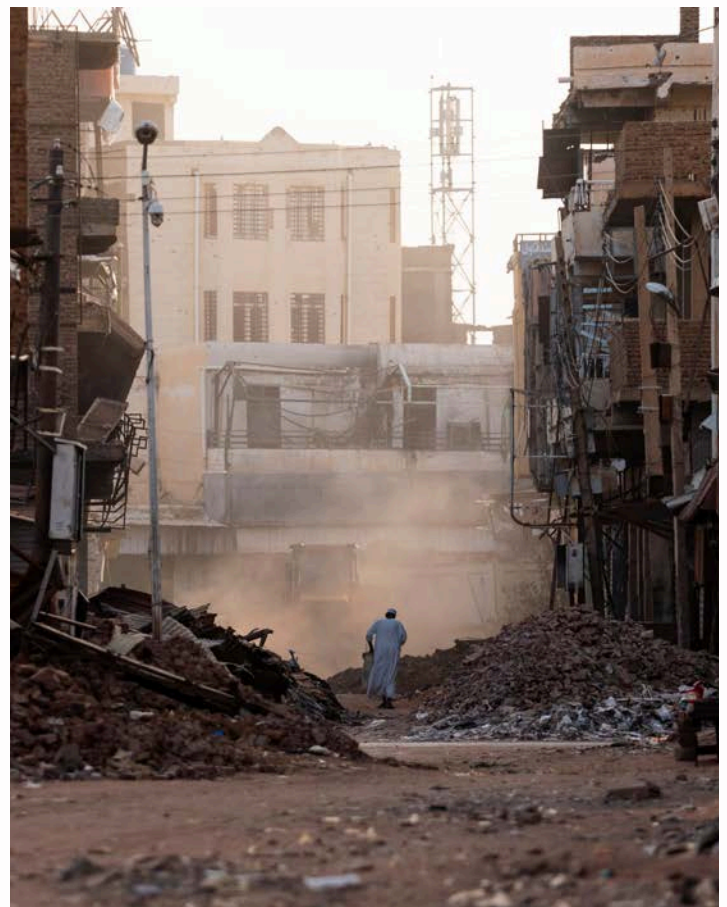
The use of explosive weapons, especially with wide area effects, in populated areas has caused massive harm in recent conflicts around the world. This practice causes foreseeable deaths and injuries to civilians. It also has reverberating effects, notably damage to infrastructure, which interrupts basic services, such as water, electricity, health care, and education.

Growing Arms Trade

The arms trade is expanding. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), from 2021-2025, arms transfers increased 9.2 percent compared to the previous five-year period. Arms imports in Europe rose 210 percent, in part because Ukraine has been the world's largest arms importer since Russia's full-scale invasion.⁴

Proliferation of New Technology

The increased use of artificial intelligence (AI) in weapons systems endangers civilians. Armed drones, recently used in the Middle East, Sudan, and Ukraine, and weapons with AI-based decision support systems, used by Israel in Gaza, have caused civilian casualties and many legal concerns. These technologies serve as a warning of the impending threat of autonomous weapons systems and the loss of meaningful human control over the use of force.



People pass through a destroyed section of Omdurman, Sudan, on May 25, 2025. Credit: Carolyn Van Houten | The Washington Post via Getty Images, 2025.

Legal Challenges

Agreements made are being put aside for the desire of those states to protect their borders at any cost.

Verity Coyle, Human Rights Watch

Withdrawals from Treaties

States have challenged humanitarian disarmament law by withdrawing from its treaties. In 2025-2026, five states parties—Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland—withdrew from the Mine Ban Treaty, and Lithuania left the Convention on Cluster Munitions. In addition, Ukraine unlawfully suspended its operation of the Mine Ban Treaty in July 2025. All of these states cited national security concerns.

Abuse of Legal Processes

Certain states have used rules of procedure to interfere with humanitarian disarmament objectives. Russia has abused consensus-based decision-making to block progress toward a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons systems under the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW). Russia has also blocked discussions of CCW Protocol III on incendiary weapons, despite widespread concerns about the weapons' humanitarian consequences and the protocol's shortcomings.

Unlawful Use of Weapons

Use of antipersonnel landmines, cluster munitions, and explosive weapons in populated areas, regardless of whether a state is party to relevant humanitarian disarmament instruments, frequently violates international humanitarian law because the means or methods of attacks are indiscriminate. Such actions reinforce the general disregard for international law.

Exceptionalism and Hypocrisy

Some states interpret and implement international humanitarian law differently in different conflicts. For example, some European states have been more tolerant of arms transfers to Ukraine than elsewhere in the world. Such exceptionalism exacerbates the decline of the rules-based order and has been seen as hypocritical in some parts of the Global South.



Airbursts of artillery-fired white phosphorus fall over the Gaza city port, October 11, 2023.
Credit: Mohammed Adeb | AFP via Getty Image, 2023.

Political Challenges

State Prioritization of National Security

States increasingly emphasize their need to protect their national security and use that rhetoric to justify actions contrary to humanitarian disarmament norms. This shift in focus has been especially common since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a conflict that has brought war to Europe and caused more than 55,000 civilian casualties.⁵

Increased Militarization

States have used national security arguments and public fear to justify a significant increase in defense spending. According to SIPRI, in 2024, defense spending increased 9.4 percent to a total of \$2,718 billion.⁷ Many states are focused on rearming rather than disarming, while the arms industry often escapes scrutiny due to a lack of transparency.

Public Fear

News of the increasing number of armed conflicts around the world has generated fear among the general public in many countries.⁶ Their concern makes them open to the national security arguments presented by their governments and less interested in the protection of civilians generally.

People say that we need to defend against any threat with more armies or more weapons, not laws. That's a bad message for the world.

Camilo Serna,
Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas



US troops load munition packages bound for Ukraine onto a plane at the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, in 2022.
Credit: Twitter account of the US Department of Defense, 2022.

Practical Challenges

With a huge reduction in funding ... we couldn't do research, bring survivors to conferences, travel in the way we wanted.

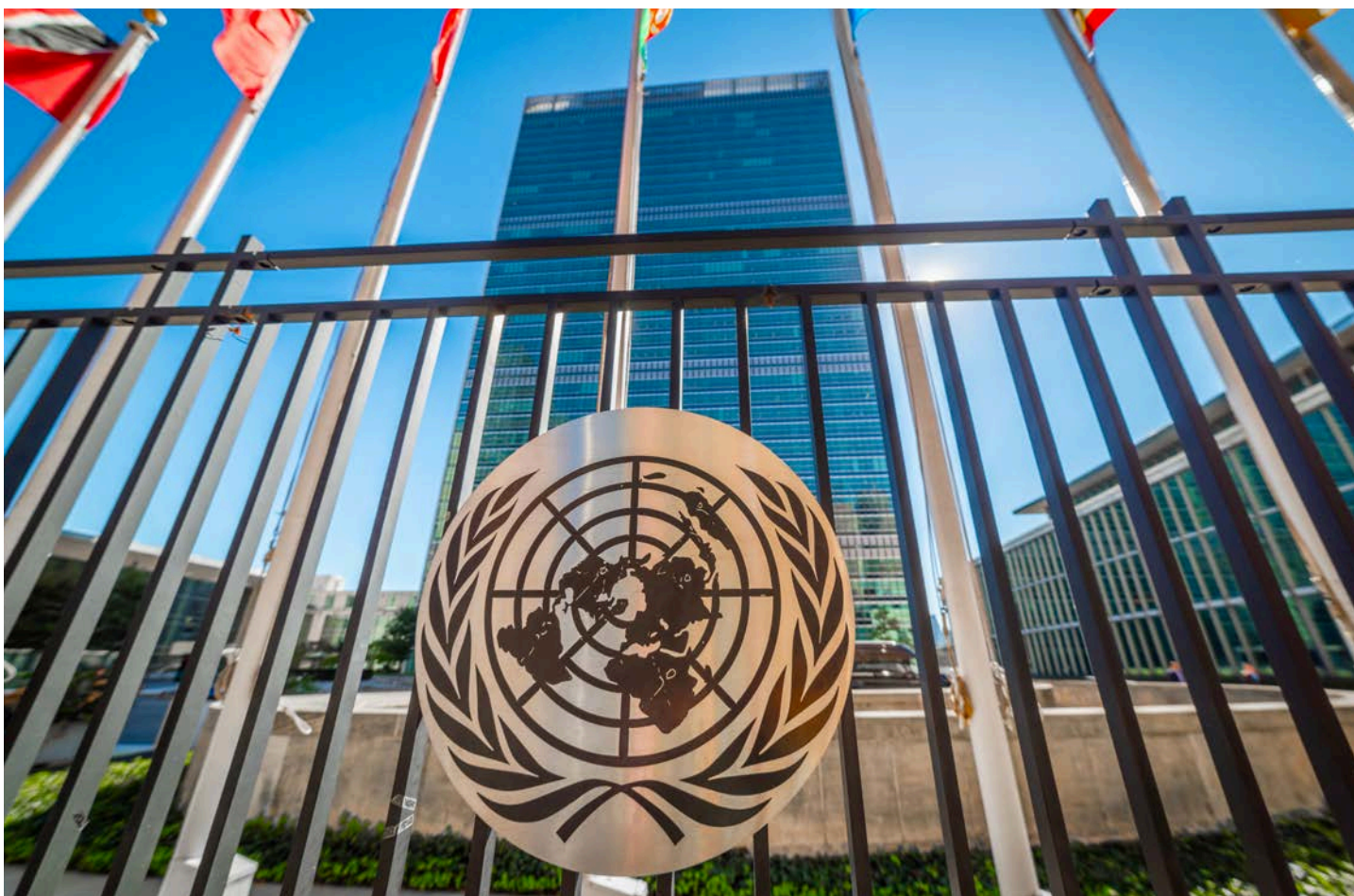
Alma Taslidžan, Humanity & Inclusion

Funding Cuts

Humanitarian disarmament campaigns have felt the impacts of funding cuts on advocacy, research, and mine action work. Between 2024 and 2025, global funding available to humanitarian actors fell by more than 30 percent.⁸ This loss of resources has created impediments to documenting harm and monitoring compliance, engaging stakeholders at a national level, and bringing survivors and campaigners to international and regional conferences.

Access to Decision-Makers

Campaigners have experienced difficulty accessing decision-makers. In addition to lack of travel funds, campaigners and affected individuals have encountered more stringent visa requirements, especially for the US, home to the UN's headquarters in New York. Passes to important meetings and the facilities in which they take place have also become more restricted.



Campaigners have faced increased difficulties accessing relevant disarmament meetings, particularly at the UN headquarters in New York.
Credit: Gabriele Maltinti – stock.adobe.com.

STAYING STRONG

Value

While facing the effects of the challenges described above, campaigners have remained firm in their commitment to humanitarian disarmament. Interviewees unanimously highlighted the value of the movement as a means to call attention to arms-inflicted harm and to promote legal norms to address it. Many also praised the humanitarian disarmament community, which has helped them stay motivated and positive.

It's central for us to be strong in the humanitarian disarmament world. We can help remind people that there is a better way of doing things and that innocent people don't have to suffer.

Paul Hannon, Mines Action Canada

Humanitarian disarmament has given us the best guardrails [and] rules of the road.... We need these frameworks, and we need them to grow.

Susi Snyder, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

We together, the common people, can do something to strengthen norms and build new norms and try to build a world where we can respect each other.

Camilo Serna, Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas



ICAN campaigners express their support for a ban on nuclear weapons during negotiations of a new treaty at the UN in New York.
Credit: Clare Conboy, ICAN, 2017.

Viability

Campaigners argued that humanitarian disarmament continues to be a viable as well as valuable approach to governing weapons. They expressed faith in the movement’s capacity to weather the current geopolitical storm and humanity’s ability and desire to collectively decrease suffering.

I remember speaking to older campaigners and saying this is terrible ... but they said no, it is a wave and it will go up again.

Verity Coyle, Human Rights Watch

A power of the humanitarian disarmament movement is having mechanisms where globally those who are committed to reducing civilian suffering ... come together and ... speak in one voice to condemn steps to the contrary.

Alicia Sanders-Zakre, ICAN

I still believe people around the world are concerned about welfare of one another and think that peace is better than war.

Jeff Abramson, Center for International Policy

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In November 2025, the UN General Assembly’s First Committee on Disarmament and International Security passed a resolution calling for states to complete their discussions on autonomous weapons systems “with a view to future negotiations.” The full General Assembly adopted a final version of the resolution by an even larger margin the next month. The widespread support for starting to negotiate a new treaty shows that humanitarian disarmament work continues despite geopolitical obstacles. Credit: Stop Killer Robots, 2025.

STRATEGIES

Campaigners have many means available to respond to contemporary challenges and affirm the value of humanitarian disarmament. They may revive successful strategies of the past, expand existing methods, and develop new approaches. Finding the right combination will help humanitarian disarmament continue to adapt and advance as it has done for the past 30 years.

Positive messaging is central to the protection and promotion of humanitarian disarmament, especially in a political environment shaped by increasingly negative narratives. Important approaches to messaging, include providing reasons for hope, connecting humanitarian norms to national security interests, and emphasizing progress.

Humanitarian disarmament has long relied on partnerships as a key element of its success. Members of civil society have joined forces in global campaigns to collectively advance their aims. They have also collaborated with governments, international organizations, and survivors in the development of new international law. Campaigns should build on this practice, reinforcing existing partnerships and building new ones, to address the challenges of the current environment.

Maintaining the success of humanitarian disarmament further depends on revisiting other elements of the approach on which campaigns have relied. While continuing to develop and defend international law, they should be open minded and creative as they determine the advocacy targets, norm-building tactics, and campaign tools best suited to achieve the movement's humanitarian goals in today's environment.



International
Network on
Explosive Weapons



ICAN
International Campaign to
Abolish Nuclear Weapons



MESSAGING

Hope-Based Arguments

The most effective means to counter negativity is messaging that offers hope. Campaigns should highlight progress to date and the possibility of further change.

Focusing on Tangible Achievements

Messaging should emphasize concrete outcomes such as casualties prevented, stockpiles destroyed, land cleared, and assistance provided to survivors. Since the Mine Ban Treaty's entry into force, 94 states parties have destroyed more than 55 million stockpiled antipersonnel mines, 32 states parties have completed clearance, and risk education and victim assistance programs have been established.⁹

Recall Successes

Highlighting and contextualizing past achievements, such as the negotiations of the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions in the wake of the wars following September 11, and the adoption of the 2017 treaty banning nuclear weapons despite stalemate among nuclear powers in other forums, demonstrate that humanitarian disarmament breakthroughs are possible even during periods of geopolitical tension.

Explain Gradual Progress

Messaging should remind audiences that humanitarian disarmament advances through incremental steps, each of which is an accomplishment in itself. Underscoring the cumulative nature of the process can help manage expectations while showing that steady progress leads to meaningful humanitarian impact.

Tell our success stories. Show that there are still good things, still people doing good work, and still good possibilities... Provide some light in the darkness. People are looking for that.

Erin Hunt,
Mines Action Canada



Delegates applaud the adoption of the Convention on Cluster Munitions at the Dublin Diplomatic Conference on May 30, 2008. Credit: Mary Wareham, Human Rights Watch, 2008.

Appeals to National Interests

Humanitarian arguments alone may not persuade policymakers and the public. Messaging that connects disarmament norms to state interests and security concerns may also be effective.

Highlight Security Benefits

While humanitarian disarmament has traditionally focused on addressing arms-inflicted human suffering, it can also be consistent with national security goals. Regulating arms reduces the risk of conflict escalation, contributing to global and regional stability. A ban on weapons that cause unacceptable harm keeps them out of an enemy's arsenal, protecting the lives of a state's own civilians and soldiers.

Tailor to States

Campaigns can tie humanitarian disarmament initiatives to a specific state's values, leadership, or international reputation. For example, campaigns can appeal to Canada and Norway to support disarmament efforts based on their role as leaders of the processes to create the treaties banning antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions, respectively.

States still know that it's in their best interest to be perceived as preventing human suffering. As long as that's the case, then we still have a large platform to stand on.

Isabelle Jones, Stop Killer Robots

Emphasis on Progress

Because setbacks can adversely affect perceptions of humanitarian disarmament efforts, campaigns should ensure that they are not seen as signs that the whole movement is flawed.

Explain Procedures

Messaging should distinguish between rules-related obstacles, such as consensus-based decision-making, and the underlying legitimacy of humanitarian disarmament itself. Delays in multilateral progress should be presented as part of diplomatic processes rather than evidence that the norms or treaties have failed.

When you're working on a humanitarian issue, whatever it is, you have to remember that it's ... not going to happen tomorrow. It's a continuous work in progress.

**Ayman Sorour,
PROTECTION**

Contextualize Setbacks

Communications can clarify that setbacks often result from the actions of particular states or political disputes rather than from a systemic collapse of humanitarian disarmament norms. For example, the first UN General Assembly informal consultations on autonomous weapons systems, held in May 2025, were a success for proponents of a treaty on the topic, but due to opposition by some states, the General Assembly did not agree to convene a second round of consultations in 2026. Nevertheless, its Resolution 80/57, adopted in December 2025 by a vote of 164-6 with 7 abstentions, advanced treaty efforts by calling on CCW high contracting parties to complete their discussions of elements of an instrument "with a view to future negotiations."

PARTNERSHIPS

Cross-Campaign Collaboration

To strengthen the movement's collective impact, humanitarian disarmament campaigns should look for opportunities to increase coordination. Cross-campaign collaboration helps organizations bolster each other's efforts, share expertise, strategize together, pool their limited resources, and avoid duplicating work.



Show Solidarity

Humanitarian disarmament campaigns should express solidarity for each other during good times and bad in order to strengthen their common and individual causes. When five states withdrew from the Mine Ban Treaty, the major campaigns joined the International Campaign to Ban Landmines in a statement condemning the decisions. Individual organizations can also contribute; although Human Rights Watch does not work on nuclear disarmament, it celebrated the 2017 and 2024 Nobel Peace Prizes of ICAN and Nihon Hidankyo. Members of the humanitarian disarmament community can support each other on a regular basis through digital advocacy, creating shared hashtags and reposting each other's content.



Exchange Lessons

Campaigns should share experiences and best practices related to implementation and reporting. They should also ensure that interpretations of similar provisions are consistent across treaties to preserve and strengthen humanitarian disarmament norms. Such efforts have helped the victim assistance obligations in the Convention on Cluster Munitions influence understandings of such provisions in other humanitarian disarmament instruments. More systematic efforts for sharing information would be beneficial, and campaigns should consider ways to communicate more effectively across the community.



Convene Gatherings

Participation in meetings allows members of different campaigns to share ideas, build community, and inspire each other. An annual in-person forum in New York has served as one venue. In 2025-2026, the Forum on the Arms Trade held remote meetings before and after that forum to facilitate additional exchanges. The technology required for such large online meetings with interpretation can be challenging and expensive, but the concept is worth exploring when feasible.



Sharing Resources

Campaigns can collaborate on funding proposals for joint projects of shared relevance. These projects could focus on areas such as monitoring and reporting, victim assistance, or clearance efforts. Campaigns could also reduce operational costs by hiring shared staff, such as for communications or finance, and splitting travel costs to UN meetings that deal with multiple issues.

The siloed approach I don't think is helpful in a very fragmented world. Joining forces we stand stronger.

Nicole van Rooijen, Stop Killer Robots

Community and Campaigner Inclusion

Humanitarian disarmament campaigns should ensure that they are meaningfully involving affected communities and their representative organizations in their work. They should also work closely with national campaigners to find ways to make those individuals heard in international forums, particularly in contexts where distance makes access to advocacy spaces difficult.



Partner with Affected Communities and National Campaigners

Building partnerships with affected communities and national NGOs can promote development of advocacy strategies that respond to specific priorities and concerns about disarmament. Global campaigns should provide information, political backing, and when possible funding to these groups to help them advocate in their own countries where they are often better positioned to influence government actors.



Promote Meaningful Participation

Affected communities should continue to have the opportunity to share their first-hand experiences of harm and to participate in the processes to determine how to address it. Humanitarian disarmament campaigns have long worked with these groups but, as challenges to inclusion increase, have had to find innovative ways to ensure their views are represented. Campaigns have used methods such as arranging for participation in hybrid international meetings, pre-recording video messaging, and calling for affected communities to receive ample advance notice of processes in order to engage effectively.

[We should] find ways to give voices to those people who are living the hardship and have this incredible energy.... Those voices are extremely strong.

**Rasmus Sandvoll Weschke,
Norwegian People's Aid**



Establish Communication

Campaigns should create mechanisms, such as designated focal points, to facilitate communication with affected communities. When working with survivors, campaigns should be sensitive to and communicate potential risks (e.g., visibility, security, retraumatization) and implement appropriate safeguards.



Nujeen Mustafa, Syrian survivor of the bombing of Aleppo, lays flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Civilian in Dublin on the occasion of the endorsement of the Political Declaration on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas in November 2022. Credit: Bonnie Docherty, 2022.

Partnerships with Other Groups

Expanding partnerships beyond traditional humanitarian and diplomatic actors would have additional advocacy benefits. These partnerships can be short term and issue specific and aimed at engaging people and entities that traditional advocacy typically does not reach.



Connect with Other Movements

Campaigns should look for opportunities to build partnerships with movements focused on related issues to highlight intersections, gain new allies, and reach new audiences. The racial justice and environmental movements, for example, both share concerns with humanitarian disarmament campaigns. Autonomous weapons systems threaten to discriminate by race as well as other statuses due to algorithmic bias. Nuclear weapons testing, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and other military activities have caused significant environmental damage.



Engage Youth

To attract new humanitarian disarmament campaigners to the field, engaging the next generation in the movement is key. Campaigns can involve young people through developing education programs, leveraging existing youth movements, and creating experiential opportunities such as Model UN-style negotiations on humanitarian disarmament issues. Stop Killer Robots campaigners were well-received at the 2019 World Scout Jamboree, and youth campaigners have regularly delivered statements at the meetings of states parties of humanitarian disarmament treaties.



Collaborate with Business

Campaigns should consider partnering with private actors to integrate humanitarian disarmament messaging into these unconventional spaces. ICAN, for example, has worked with an Italian bank for several years, sharing information on nuclear disarmament with its clients and encouraging them to put political pressure on politicians.



Reach out to Opponents

Campaigns could selectively reach out to actors who do not traditionally support humanitarian disarmament goals (e.g., political leaders or administrations) to identify points of alignment or opportunities for incremental progress on specific issues.

If there are shrinking resources for civil society, [we should consider] how can we work together more and with a wider range of people [and] think whether humanitarian disarmament can be linked and expanded to other movements and goals to strengthen us all.

Elizabeth Minor, Stop Killer Robots

TARGETS, TACTICS, AND TOOLS

Advocacy Targets

In recent years, humanitarian disarmament campaigns have focused their efforts on influencing diplomats, most of whom are based at the UN in Geneva or New York. Although this audience remains important, as geopolitics has become more divisive, directing advocacy toward a wider audience would be beneficial.

Shift Government Advocacy

Campaigns should consider targeting their advocacy at government officials in capitals more than at those representing countries in international forums. In an environment increasingly motivated by state interests, domestic policymakers are the ones driving national decision-making.

Expand Public Outreach

Humanitarian disarmament campaigns should pay more attention to the general public, which can put pressure on elected politicians and government officials, particularly in capital. To do so, they should ally with groups that have backed humanitarian disarmament initiatives in the past, including faith leaders, tech workers, youth, and academics, and even corporations, industry, and the military.

We need to ... rethink ... who we are targeting.... It's so important that we speak less in Geneva and more in Nairobi and Brussels and DC. We also have to speak more to the general public.

Alma Taslidžan, Humanity & Inclusion



Stop Killer Robots campaign truck drives through the streets of New York to generate public support for a new treaty on autonomous weapons systems. Credit: Stop Killer Robots, 2024.

Norm-Building Tactics

A primary method for achieving humanitarian disarmament's goal of reducing arms-inflicted human suffering remains the establishment and implementation of norms. Without abandoning the halls of the UN, campaigns should pursue additional strategies to promote and expand such norms.

Seize Diplomatic Opportunities

Humanitarian disarmament campaigns should make strategic decisions about when and how to use major treaty meetings to bolster their cause. In 2026 alone, the review conferences of four treaties provide an opportunity for them to use traditional diplomacy to underscore the value of international law.¹⁰ Campaigns should encourage participation from senior government officials, such as ministers of foreign affairs, and call for states to express their support for strong implementation and interpretation of the treaties.

Ensure Relevance

While defending past achievements, campaigns should expand humanitarian disarmament norms, as they are doing with the campaign for a new treaty on autonomous weapons systems. Such work will help prevent an emerging technology from causing grave ethical, legal, accountability, and security risks to civilians. It will also bolster the movement as a whole by demonstrating its relevance to cutting-edge issues.

Support National Campaigns

As states use national security arguments as excuses to back away from humanitarian disarmament norms, more campaigning should be done at the domestic level. Government officials and the public that can influence them are more likely to be persuaded by national civil society groups than external ones who may not understand their country's specific situation. Global campaigns can support national groups by providing information and analyses. Groups in different countries can offer solidarity to each other by, for example, joining the Mayors for Peace cities campaign; a comparable campaign for "humanitarian disarmament cities" has been proposed.

Use Regional Forums

Regional forums on humanitarian disarmament topics can be effective because they bring together states with common interests, allow for more focused advocacy, help build unity around an issue, and give more voice to the Global South. They can in turn help advance development of international norms. For example, the 2018 Santiago and 2017 Maputo communiqués helped garner support for the 2022 Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. Regional meetings on autonomous weapons systems in Costa Rica, the Philippines, and Trinidad and Tobago as well as a global one in Austria have helped strengthen international support for a new legally binding instrument.

Review conferences enable a reinterpretation and an updated interpretation of the treaty that sparks them.... [They] have extended the normative impact of these treaties.

Susi Snyder, ICAN

Campaign Tools

While some proven means of success remain relevant, new times call for new tools. Campaigns should break out of their field's comfort zone and adopt fresh ways to reach and influence their advocacy targets. They should look for opportunities particularly in the areas of communication and research.

Embrace New Media

Traditional media still plays a role, but humanitarian disarmament campaigns should explore other forms of communication, particularly social media, including TikTok and Instagram. Many members of the general public, especially youth, are accustomed to getting information from such sources.

Communicate Accessibly

Messaging should convert technical language and concepts into a form that is understandable to a broad audience, including the public, civil society, and affected individuals, so they can understand issues and participate in humanitarian disarmament processes. Doing so could help win support from people who are sympathetic to humanitarian disarmament's goal of preventing civilian harm, but do not understand the value of the law to address the problem.

Conduct Research

The monitors produced by different campaigns have long served as key sources of information about the implementation of humanitarian disarmament treaties, and those initiatives should continue. Civil society should also continue to document unacceptable arms-inflicted harm, including that from emerging technologies. Such investigations help counter the increasingly common spread of false information. Because readers' time is limited, researchers should complement their detailed products with shorter documents summarizing findings and identifying trends.

Survey and Empower the Public

Capturing public views through surveys and other means can influence positions of national governments. In March 2026, ICAN launched a tool (built by Tectonica) tracking support for banning nuclear weapons from parliamentarians, NGOs, and cities in different countries.¹¹ Civil society research can also stimulate grassroots action. ICAN reports on corporations investing in nuclear weapons production and universities involved in the nuclear weapons complex inspired local protests.

We need to be creative. That's a way to be relevant.... That's the way we adapt.... Use the tools we need to use, not just the ones we're comfortable using.

Rasmus Sandvoll Weschke, Norwegian People's Aid

FINAL WORDS

In the course of researching this guide, the IHRC team was inspired by campaigners' unwavering commitment to ending civilian suffering, belief in the humanitarian approach to governing weapons, and sense of solidarity across the community. These final words exemplify their ongoing determination to join forces and make change despite challenging times.

I like going back to historical stories of success ... and recognizing [that] it was often at the darkest times that there were breakthroughs.... We need to communicate more that it was possible before and it is possible now, too.

Alicia Sanders-Zakre,
ICAN

The inspiration you can get from others is very valuable.... Let's find what we can do together that we can't do separately, and figure out what our priorities are, and start ticking some off.

Jeff Abramson,
Center for International Policy

List of Interviewees

Jeff Abramson, Senior Non-Resident Fellow, Center for International Policy

Verity Coyle, Deputy Director for Arms in the Crisis, Conflict and Arms Division, Human Rights Watch

Paul Hannon, Executive Director (retired), Mines Action Canada

Erin Hunt, Executive Director, Mines Action Canada

Isabelle Jones, Head of Government Relations & Advocacy, Stop Killer Robots

Hine-Wai Loose, Director, Control Arms

Elizabeth Minor, Head of Policy, Stop Killer Robots

Alicia Sanders-Zakre, Head of Policy, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

Camilo Serna, Deputy Director and Co-Founder, Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas (Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines)

Susi Snyder, Director of Programmes, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

Ayman Sorour, Founding Executive Director, PROTECTION

Alma Taslidžan, Disarmament and Protection of Civilians Advocacy Manager, Humanity & Inclusion

Nicole van Rooijen, Executive Director, Stop Killer Robots

Rasmus Sandvoll Weschke, Senior Policy Advisor, Norwegian People's Aid

Endnotes

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¹⁰ The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Convention on Cluster Munitions, Convention on Conventional Weapons, and Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

¹¹ ICAN, “Where the World Stands on the Ban,” <https://www.icanw.org/mapping-ican>.

Acknowledgments

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For more information on humanitarian disarmament, see: <https://humanitariandisarmament.org/>.